



**PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COUNCIL
MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING
*February 03, 2014***

The Pedestrian Advisory convened in a regular meeting on February 3, 2014, 721 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas.

Guests in Attendance:

Lauren Bennett
Ken Craig
Nancy Crowther
Valerie Fruge
Charlotte Garza

Steve Hopkins
Girard Kinney
Ramah Leith
Carmen de la Morena
Marva Overton

Alba Sereno
Heyden Walker
Robyn Webre

Staff in Attendance:

Robert Anderson
Lawrence Deeter

Pamela Larson
Francis Reilly

Mike Rios

CALL TO ORDER

Staff called the Board Meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

Lawrence Deeter (as citizen) spoke to the sidewalk fee-in-lieu fund. He said that his understanding from a previous meeting is that money collected is not being spent. He said he had a conversation with a developer who intended to pay into the fund in order to not have to put in a sidewalk. He said one possible project for the PAC is to help facilitate sidewalk fee-in-lieu dollars being spent. He also said it should be the goal of the PAC to make it harder for developers to get out of constructing sidewalks

Nancy Crowther said there used to be a waiver process.

Girard Kinney said that fee-in-lieu is commonly used by developers in instances when it is judged to be less expensive than building a sidewalk. He said the fee is set to reflect cost of an average sidewalk. He said he desires a third choice, where developers can opt to build a sidewalk elsewhere.

Developers opt out of fee-in-lieu where the set fee is less than the cost of putting in a sidewalk. More than a simple cost, less than a complex cost (i.e. retaining wall). His neighborhood [Upper Boggy Creek] has proposed a process for where a sidewalk is to be built on an existing street (neighborhood preference, one side, no sidewalk) developer can do a 3rd choice: build a sidewalk somewhere else where the neighborhood desires. Each neighborhood planning area has a fund, and each fund needs a minimum of \$100,000.

Alba Sereno advertised a Go! Austin/Vamos! community event for Monday, February 10.

A location was identified for a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB) but the location is a 2-lane artery (more than 1-mile long without a crossing) which, according to the draft PHB location criteria, renders it ineligible.

RA: PHB Review Group is taking comments and reviewing them in the criteria. They added engineering judgment as a criteria they were developing the set of criteria for PHB location.

A question is asked, when a PHB is not viable, why is there no other option? What is the function of the PAC? Can we be a fairly diverse group that originates solutions so the process/conversation has a faster timetable.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Nancy Crowther had communicated via email prior to the meeting a missed capital letter on the second page of the minutes. No other corrections were offered.

3. STAFF AND COMMISSION BRIEFINGS

A. Bicycle Advisory Council/Urban Transportation Commission

No briefings were offered from representatives of the BAC or UTC.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Revising the Land Development Code (CodeNEXT)

Presentation by: Matt Dugan, Planning and Development Review Department

Staff presented on CodeNEXT, the name for the revision to the Land Development Code, which will align Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (IACP) with our Land Development Regulations. The IACP kicked off in 2010, when community members asked to change and improve the code, which dictates WHAT can be built, WHERE it can be built, HOW MUCH can be built, and HOW and WHEN it can be used. The code has been amended 100's of times since its adoption in 1984, making it too complex (such as 10 reference points for a building height).

Question: Is this where developers can waive certain duties?

Mr. Dugan: Yes, this is where, and it also occurs with affordable housing.

The process is open to everyone to comment on Chapter 25; certain users (architects, engineers, builders) know it, but, CodeNEXT wants to hear from all to understand *Community Character*. Knowledge of community character is furthered by photo walking tours, and Mr. Dugan asked for the assistance of the community to capture the sense of place to help capture all 103 neighborhood reporting areas.

Marva Overton asked about the definition of Neighborhood Reporting Areas. Mr. Dugan answered how in Central Austin where neighborhood plans are adopted they used existing boundaries, but for the 84% of land area City Staff identified boundaries.

Girard Kinney clarified that City Council established the boundaries of neighborhood planning areas (NPA) which is the bundling of multiple neighborhoods. This distinction is essential as oftentimes City Staff mentions that community members need to contact a neighborhood, when they must contact an NPA.

Mr. Dugan commented on “missing middle” housing (bungalow courts, duplexes, townhomes, etc.) which are missing in Austin. Austin’s significant problems of congestion, water supply, affordability could be lessened by density. Explained the 4 steps in CodeNEXT’s timeline; presently in Step 1 the Listening/Understanding step, and are working to adopt Code by June 2016. Through each step they will reach out to the community, boards and commissions, and Council to keep all informed. The timeline will include **two** Council elections. He reviewed outreach-to-date which includes interviews, large public meetings, ambassadorships to increase diversity and presentations to groups. People like parks and neighborhood character, but, don’t like traffic, lack of transit, lack of neighborhood businesses and increasing costs of growth. He reviewed ways to participate online, through social media, by phone and meetings.

Staff mentioned that the Pedestrian Advisory Council can submit in writing issues with the Code through a Community Issue Paper or Community Viewpoint. Memos, letters, table of recommendations or the input form are all acceptable.

Girard Kinney mentioned that many of the areas this group is interested in are within Subchapter E, which discusses walkability within and between commercial sites. Visibility/light is another issue area.

Carmen de la Morena-Chu expressed there are many ways to provide productive information (public plazas),

Lauren Bennet agreed and asked about how to reduce the driveway curb cuts for commercial businesses, and how to get involved in the code.

Carmen asks how to intelligibly approach the 800-page text, such as searching.

Mr. Dugan said that if there are individuals who are familiar with the Code, they can be guides. If community members have had problematic processes with permitting, a Case Study input form exists to tell consultants about special approvals, suggestions, etc.

Girard Kinney commented on the need to communicate to the community issues surrounding grandfathering, and what the code can and cannot do.

Q: Is it an implementation or review issue when sidewalks are installed inconsistently (such as jumping from one side of the road to the other)?

A: Each case may be site-specific

Q: Can we ask for pedestrian-level review to be prioritized in the Code?

A: Mr. Dugan mentioned that the prioritization sounds like a policy, and the Code cannot always prioritize. Ms. Larson mentioned that preambles or vision statements serve to ensure that codes are interpreted by reviewers with the original intention; Mr. Dugan mentioned Planning Directors can have administrative approval to allow up to 10 or 15% variance to the project. Staff mentioned that the Code shares *how* sidewalks get constructed and he will email to attendee list in order to start a working group centered around Code issues. Heyden Black mentioned that the Transportation Criteria Manual also is being updated and the Code working group should consider the TCM. Mr. Anderson mentioned that with the TCM as a technical document, less public review is available.

Mr. Dugan asked for PAC's input on upcoming draft products (Diagnosis, Listening to the Community Report) that CodeNEXT will have, staff will share these to the PAC via the Google Group.

B. Ross Complex Subdivision Case

A Subdivision case came to the attention of City Staff and is shared with the PAC. Typically a Chair writes a letter of group opinion on behalf of the group, in absence of a Chair, staff will draft the letter and record PAC's vote.

Developer is requesting a variance from a fully built stub street to connect through the property to Ross Road, and instead will install a private drive and a pedestrian easement. Private drives are not constructed to City standards, and proposed curvature could lead to recommendation of gating for safety. A second consideration is that sidewalks will not be installed on both sides of the street. The third consideration is that the joining of a private drive with a road does not create an intersection which is not

Girard said that any City street intersection is an implied walkway in Texas, requiring parking setbacks, and PHB opportunities. This is for public streets and private streets.

Lawrence mentioned that the private drive aligns with the entrance to the school.

Girard made a motion that Zoning and Platting Commission should not grant a variance. Existing land pattern is public streets. We as a City are working to get away from long, skinny sites and dead

ends. If interested in walkability, PAC should insist that this is built as a public street with sidewalks on both sides.

Lauren Bennett asked what the property's issue is, which must be the basis to get a variance. Staff answered that there has not been an answer to the any issue.

Mentioned that if the school wants to make this a Safe Routes to School site this is not assisting with SRTS. Staff shared information on existing SRTS infrastructure on the north and south side of the proposed site crossing Ross Road.

Stephen asked what rules are required to grant a variance. Staff is not versed on Zoning and Platting Commission's variance procedures, many private drives are requested from the cost difference between public streets and private drives. Staff said cost is normally not a factor boards are allowed to consider. Stephen mentioned not knowing what was put forth as a reason for a variance he does not want to set a position. Marva Overton reiterated this.

Carmen mentioned that the PAC needs to have a position, such as safe pedestrian paths.

Ken Craig: Can we assume that it is safe enough to make a public street from Malarkey Road to Ross Road, recognizing that the angle of the private drive is what would recommend gating? Staff mentioned that the roadway should be able to extend to Ross without a problematic angle. A possible reason is to reduce costs.

Heyden: City has a Comprehensive Plan that works toward a compact & connected city and the best way to accomplish this is the provision of a public street.

Mr. Kinney mentioned that the original intention of the subdivision is to connect to Ross Road.

Staff asked for a resolution

RESOLUTION: The PAC recommends not approving the variance because the PAC believes that Spiers Way should be a public street with safe pedestrian sidewalks on both sides. This is important to maintain the compact and connected vision of Imagine Austin. Lauren Bennett seconded the resolution. 13 in favor - 0 opposed - 2 abstaining.

Staff will draft a recommendation on behalf of the PAC and will forward this to the Case Manager of the Ross Complex Subdivision.

Martha asked for a clarification on whether public streets are built with sidewalks on both sides.

Q: Marva Overton asked how the PAC received sites like this.

Staff said that the case was brought to the attention of Planners by a Transportation Reviewer .

Q: Alba asked how does the PAC proactively get items on the agenda?

Staff said email items to Staff and items will be placed on the agenda. In the future, the Chair and staff will work on the agenda.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A. Bylaws – Discussion and Possible Action

Due to family emergency, the presenter of this item was unable to be present. Bylaws will be addressed at a future PAC meeting.

B. Coordination with Neighborhood Groups

Presentation by: Carmen de la Morena-Chu

One organization that is available to access databases is the Neighborhood Assistance Center (NAC) at the City of Austin; City of Austin employees Carol Gibbs and Jody Zemel are staff of the NAC, and can help look up groups in the community registry.¹ Carmen is looking for groups which can present to the PAC. Next Door, Austin Neighborhoods Council and Contact Teams are interfaces for the PAC to interact. Additional items are the new website and a presentation on CodeNEXT.

Carmen asked for the PAC to originate a mission statement or a message that can be used for outreach to other organizations. She asked for members to bring suggestions for a mission statement at the subsequent meeting, or to email her. Carmen will be working on crafting a message.

Carmen shared documentaries and a video on other cities which are growing and what they are doing which can be used for Austin. The Enrique Peñalosa talk is insightful for messaging around walking. These links will be shared through the Google listserv.

Staff reaffirmed ways to get in contact and work with neighborhood groups. Martha asked about diverse geographies representation in the PAC. Staff mentioned that this is an avenue to get different people involved. Ms. Overton asked about how to reach as many people as possible. Carmen mentioned that the Community Registry is not as reliably updated and has heard that the Neighborhood Contact Team list is more up-to-date. Carmen asked for group members' knowledge of different organizations' structure. She will look into the structure.

6. FUTURE BUSINESS

Heyden spoke on future TXDOT transportation plans to push all IH-35 traffic onto the frontage roads. This will present a problem for pedestrians, though TXDOT Staff working on that project mention that it will be good for pedestrians.

TXDOT is proposing to close Woodland at IH-35 which is a prime pedestrian and bicycle connection.

¹ The community registry is maintained by the City's Corporate Public Information Office staff.

Rama would like to hear more about grandfathering, and what opportunities exist that the PAC can work to install sidewalks or fix missing curb cuts (curb ramps). Ms. Overton mentioned that her neighborhood has used SRTS to fix the missing sidewalk network.

Ms. Overton asked whether the PAC will receive an update on the Ross Subdivision Complex. Staff affirmed that the PAC will receive an update, and presently the Ross Subdivision Complex has not been scheduled for Zoning and Platting Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

Staff adjourned the meeting at 8:12 p.m. without objection.

